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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1661  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5924  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 8673  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4571  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2275  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5122  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BANGKOK 001370

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - CORRECT PARA SEQ NUMBER FROM 8

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/02/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMESE PM VISIT: RTG FOCUSES ON ECONOMIC  
COOPERATION, NOT DEMOCRACY

REF: A. BANGKOK 1327  
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 846  
[1](#)C. RANGOON 262

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) The RTG used Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein's first state visit to Thailand primarily to highlight areas of economic engagement between the neighboring countries. Thai PM Samak Sundaravej made a show of welcoming Thein Sein to the Government House and expanding on various opportunities for collaboration between Thailand and Burma, while seemingly downplaying concerns in the international community about the credibility of Burma's upcoming referendum process. In public statements and private meetings, the RTG proved reluctant to toughen its position on Burma, preferring to reiterate its oft-repeated adherence to non-interference, although FM Noppadon was more forward-leaning. Thein Sein had an audience with King Bhumibol in which the two reportedly had a warm exchange of views. End summary.

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RTG SUPPORTIVE OF BURMA'S PATH TO DEMOCRACY  
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[1](#)2. (C) In meetings with Thai officials during his April 29 - May 1 visit to Thailand, Thein Sein sought to explain the

state of Burma's political situation, MFA Senior Burma Desk Officer Jirusaya Birananda told PolOff. According to Jirusaya, MFA Permanent Secretary Virasakdi Futrakul had told his staff going in to the meeting with Thein Sein that it was up to the Burmese leaders to determine the best way to move Burma forward. Thailand's message to the Burmese would remain clear: the Thais had no intention to deviate from their core policy of engagement with Burma and adherence to the principle of non-interference.

13. (C) In discussions with Thailand's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Thein Sein was the one to raise Burma's political situation, according to MFA sources. He reiterated the Burmese junta's commitment to its political roadmap and guaranteed that the constitutional referendum would take place May 10 as planned. Real political progress would be made, he maintained, during the two years leading up to the 2010 scheduled elections, during which time Burma's political parties would have the opportunity to organize. Thein Sein concluded by repeating Senior General Than Shwe's statement during Burma's Armed Forces Day that the military would be willing to transfer power to the civilian government chosen by the people during the 2010 elections.

14. (C) Jirusaya told us that the RTG was pleased to receive confirmation of Burma's political plans directly from Thein Sein. When asked, Jirusaya admitted that neither Thein Sein nor any RTG officials addressed the issue of the draft constitution's enshrinement of the Burmese military's hold on power (Ref C). "We did not get into such specifics" she responded. She indicated that due to Thailand's own experience with its military's gradual phasing out of political involvement, the RTG would be reluctant to criticize Burma's military for maintaining a role in governing the country.

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BURMESE PM HAS AUDIENCE WITH THE KING  
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15. (SBU) King Bhumibol granted Thein Sein an audience on April 30. A senior ranking official from the Government House told us that the King's invitation was not a particular favor to the Burmese leader, but rather a customary formality given to any foreign leader on a state visit. Our review of leaders granted an audience with the King during the past year supported this statement.

16. (C) Arsa Sarasin, King Bhumibol's Principal Private Secretary, provided Ambassador John on May 1 with the key points from the audience with King Bhumibol. (Arsa participated in the one-hour audience.) Arsa said the King extended warm greetings to Thein Sein, stressing the long common bond between Thailand and Burma. The King stated Thein Sein's visit was a "good omen," and the two countries had to work together, even though the EU and U.S. opposed such cooperation. Thein Sein agreed to promote Thai-Burmese cooperation, saying that the King's visit to Burma 30 years ago remained important, and the tree that he had planted on that visit remained a valuable symbol, reminding future generations of the close ties between the Burmese and Thai people. Understanding the USG's position on the need for Thai pressure on Burma, Arsa commented to the Ambassador that the audience had a cordial tone because the Thais "can't choose our neighbors." Arsa noted that, compared to Thailand, the U.S. was fortunate to have Canada and Mexico on its borders.

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RTG OFFICIALS UPBEAT WITH REPORTERS  
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17. (C) In encounters with the press during the visit, PM Samak bluntly stated that the Burmese told him they support

democracy, (and then went on to describe the dinner he planned to cook for Thein Sein.) Samak further said that the junta "will put her (ASSK) on the shelf and not bother with her, which is unacceptable to foreigners. We think it's ok if she is put on the shelf." In response to the Ambassador's request for an explanation of this statement, MFA PermSec Virasakdi said that Samak's remarks were not correctly translated. Virasakdi claimed that in Thai to "put on the shelf" referred to placing a Buddha image on an elevated shelf for worship. The Burmese told Samak that they respect ASSK as Burmese General Aung San's daughter, and would respect her more if she were apolitical. The PM's remarks should be considered in that context, according to the MFA. (Comment: Even considered in this context, the remarks are clearly unhelpful. End comment.)

18. (C) FM Noppadon took a more helpful stance, saying that "Burma's constitutional referendum must be credible, fair, just and with wide public participation." Noppadon added that, at the same time, Burma would not act under the command of other countries but act in self-determination. Army Commander in Chief General Anupong Paojinda told the press that "Thailand wants democracy and positive political development in Burma. Thailand is ready to cooperate, but will not interfere with Burma's domestic affairs." Burmese PM Thein Sein did not make any comments to the press while in Thailand.

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ACTIVISTS UNHAPPY  
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19. (C) Burmese activists we spoke with were downcast about the visit. Bangkok-based Teddy Buri -- President of the Members of Parliament Union, Burma who was a NLD member elected to Burma's parliament in 1990 but had to flee to Thailand in 1992 -- surmised that the RTG's handling of Thein Sein's visit, and Samak's sympathetic comments in particular, were exactly what the Burmese leaders expected. "The Thais played right in to their hands," Teddy Buri offered. He believed that the Burmese generals used the Thais' willingness to promote a hands-off approach to Burma to ease pressure from the international community. Samak's unscripted comments served this purpose well.

110. (C) Longtime Burma advocate Leon de Riedmatten expressed disappointment that Thailand did not take advantage of Thein Sein's visit to send a stronger message to the Burmese. He also questioned the somewhat conflicting statements by Samak and Noppadon about the RTG's attitude toward political reform in Burma. He wondered whether there may be an ulterior motive for Samak's automatic support of everything Thein Sein told the Thai PM. De Riedmatten told us that unspecified influential Thais had recently been in touch with him to discuss possibilities for Thailand doing more on Burma; he suspected the Thais were upset that Indonesia was taking the lead on arranging a regional response to the current political crisis in Burma. The Thais felt they should have their own initiative on this issue, he concluded.

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AREAS OF COOPERATION EXPLORED  
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111. (U) According to press reports and an official MFA statement, the Burmese and Thai leaders discussed collaboration in the following areas:

- development of a deep sea port in Tavoy, Burma, including supporting transportation and tourism infrastructure;
- construction of two hydro-electric dams capable of producing up to 7,000 megawatts of electricity to be shared with Thailand;

-- construction of a gas pipeline connecting Burma with the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate in Rayong, Thailand;

-- signing of an agreement for natural gas production;

-- a strategy framework for development of a crop substitution program in the Shan State (Thein Sein visited a similar program in Chiang Rai province - Doi Tung II);

-- contract farming (whereby fallow land in Burma is to be leased to Thai enterprises at subsidized rates with the understanding they would employ Burmese);

-- creation of a Mekong rice cartel to allow key producer countries in the region (i.e. Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam) to exert greater influence on the world market.

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COMMENT  
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112. (C) Following PM Samak's first official visit to Burma in March, the MFA told us that the Thai PM viewed himself as a messenger between the West and Burma (Ref B). Samak recently reiterated this theme in a call with the Ambassador (Ref A). However, according to our MFA contact, Samak appeared to be in listening mode during Thein Sein's recent visit. Our MFA contact stated that the RTG is sincerely interested in seeing democracy in Burma, but continues to be content with a wait and see approach to next week's constitutional referendum and the subsequent elections slated to take place in 2010. While the Foreign Minister's public comments were consistent with this policy position, Samak seemed both off message and too sympathetic to the Burmese to establish his credibility as a useful intermediary. We will continue to make our Burma points with Samak and other senior RTG officials such as the FM, who clearly understands our points and has made the most helpful public comments of any senior official.

JOHN